

# Building and Maintaining Healthy Relationships.

Having healthy relationships with your partner, family members, coworkers, and friends will enhance your life and ensure that all feel good about themselves. Healthy relationships don't just happen. Healthy relationships take time to build and need work to keep them strong. Having healthy relationships can help us feel happy, be physically healthier, and improve how we feel about ourselves. The Mental Health Foundation, USA, states: "Having healthy, strong, stable and fulfilling relationships help tackle feelings of loneliness, isolation and improve our mental health."

## KNOW YOURSELF

What are the ingredients for building healthy relationships? Whether the relationship is romantic, platonic, work-related, parent-child, or friendship, the first building block is to know yourself. Parents play a major part in this first step. The way parents interact with and treat their children can start the process leading to healthy relationships. Wholesome parental interaction builds self-respect, self-awareness, and self-acceptance. If the child feels confident in expressing herself and can articulate her feelings, this sets the foundation for one to believe in herself and to have a positive self-esteem. This will allow the person to get in touch with her own soul. "Take the time to appreciate yourself and get in touch with your emotions to be able to express yourself clearly and more effectively. Not knowing how to regulate your emotions and express them healthily can negatively affect your mental wellbeing (Mental Health Foundation (USA))."

## START BUILDING

Another building block to healthy relationships is to get to work at building them. You do not find a healthy relationship, and it will not drop in your lap. You build one. This calls for energy, effective communication, and openness. A healthy relationship needs commitment and willingness to accommodate another's needs. It is also about respecting each other's differences and the openness to understand those differences.

## HAVE CLEAR BOUNDARIES

It is important for individuals to have clear personal boundaries and to appreciate and respect the boundaries of others, especially those close to them. These boundaries can be about what your desires and wishes are and letting others know what you expect from them. For example, when starting a romantic relationship, you should have boundaries regarding how late you stay out at night. This should be told to the partner and be respected by that person before the date. Sharing boundaries up front in the relationship takes the pressure off the relationship for unrealistic expectations. Without boundaries persons can have unexpected experiences that can cause pain and life-long frustration.

## LISTEN TO EACH OTHER

Being able to talk and share feelings, ideas, expectations, hopes, and dreams are important in building a healthy relationship. Listen to each other. Feel free to be vulnerable with people you trust. Seek to be understanding and not judgmental. Brent J. Atkinson, Professor Emeritus of Marriage and Family Therapy at Northern Illinois University, states in his article on emotional intelligence: "If you want to receive understanding, first give understanding. . . If you fail to acknowledge anything about your partner's viewpoint as reasonable, it will be very difficult for him to truly care about your viewpoint, regardless of how legitimate it is."

## **DO NOT TRY TO TAKE OVER**

The following tip is also very crucial in building healthy relationships. It is not seeking to take over or control the other person. When there is an imbalance of power in a relationship demonstrated by the way one seeks to control the other, it leads to painful, oppressive relationships. "A lot of life is about how we react to our experiences and encounters. Knowing that you can only really control what you do and not what anyone else does will save you time and stress (Mental Health Foundation)." The problem is far too many people are raised from birth to be in control of others more than in control of themselves. Hence, in a relationship they tend to dictate, direct, and inform, more than listen and negotiate. When one is in control of another, it is about hierarchy and wielding power, even in very subtle ways. At first, the participant may not even be aware of the subtle power games ahead, until a heated argument occurs, and they feel trapped in the relationship.

## **GIVE AND ASK FOR EQUAL REGARD**

Several years ago I wrote an article entitled, "Habits Used by Successful Couples," that presented six habits that came out of research on emotional intelligence by Dr. Brent J. Atkinson. There is one habit that is a much-needed building block in wholesome relationships. It is having regard for each other. What is "regard?" It is more than respect. "It is deep concern, care, sympathy." Atkinson states: "The most successful intimate partnerships operate like democracies: One person, one vote. In a democratic society, when people go to cast their votes, there is no obligation to prove that their reasoning is good enough for their votes to count. Their opinions count as much as anyone else's, regardless of what anyone thinks of their reasoning. The same is true in successful intimate relationships. Successful partners are willing to give and take, regardless of whether they agree with each other or not. . . Studies suggest that there's a line you simply can't cross in relationships and get away with it, and that line involves winning at the expense of your partner." This principle can apply to any other kind of relationship.

These are just a few of the many suggestions to help build and maintain healthy relationships. Read this article carefully and share it with others. Do your part in building and maintaining healthy relationships.

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